



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District of Columbia Zoning Commission

**FROM:** Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director for Development Review and Historic Preservation

**DATE:** April 2, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Zoning Commission Case No. 97-16A.  
Lowell School Planned Unit Development Application for a Major Modification  
1640- Kalmia Road, NW and 7775 17<sup>th</sup> Street NW. Square 2745F, Lots 815 and 817.

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**I. OP RECOMMENDATION**

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends that the Zoning Commission set this case down for a public hearing.

**II. SUMMARY OF CURRENT MODIFICATION REQUEST AND PREVIOUS PUD DECISIONS**

The applicant, the Lowell School, has filed for major modifications to an approved Planned Unit Development (PUD) for its 8.75 acre campus in the Colonial Village neighborhood of Ward 4 in northwest Washington, DC. The school currently enrolls 315 students in grades pre-school to 6, has a student cap of 400, and has filled its cap of 60 staff and faculty. The applicant is seeking Zoning Commission permission to:

- Add two new grades (7 and 8)
- Increase its staff from 60 to 100
- Improve its facilities through:
  - Selective demolition and new construction resulting in a net decrease in gross square footage
  - Construction of a parking garage, and a net increase of parking spaces from 90 to 136; and a
  - Reworking of its internal circulation system.

The applicant plans to fill out its existing student cap, and maintain its existing boundaries. The school would continue to operate on a year-round basis. Between September and June, the school's sports facilities would continue to be used on weekends by youth organizations. ANC and other community meetings would continue to be held monthly, and private parties would continue to be held approximately once a month.

In 1982, Z.C. Order 387 approved Gallaudet University's PUD request to establish a satellite campus on the site and established underlying R-1-A zoning on what had been un-zoned land. After Gallaudet sold the property, the Lowell School relocated to the site pursuant to Z.C. Order 849 in Case No. 97-16M.



**Figure 1. Lowell School Location:**



The school is located in northwest Washington, west of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, south of Kalmia Rd and north of Rock Creek Park & 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW.

The following table summarizes the previous orders' major stipulations and the applicant's current requests. Requested changes are noted in ***Bold Italics***. The complete list of existing and requested conditions is on pages 7 and 8 of the applicant's December 19, 2009 statement.

**Table 1. PUD Modification Table**

Site or PUD Condition	Currently Applicable	Requested	Notes
Site Size	361,378 SF	Same	Significant slope up from west to northeast
Zoning	R-1-A	Same	
GSF	130,024	122,801	
FAR	-None prescribed in R-1-A MOR. -0.4 for R-1-A PUD. -Currently 0.36.	<b>.34</b>	Decrease of .02 FAR
Lot Occupancy	-40% max for M-O-R & PUD in R-1-A -Current facility lot occ. is 12.72%	<b>15%</b>	
Height	40 feet	Same	
Student Enrollment	400 cap; 315 currently		Will reach 400 cap
Grades Permitted/Served	Pre-School through 6	Pre-School <b><i>through 8</i></b>	
Faculty & Employee Cap	60	<b>100</b>	
Parking Cap	60 spaces were noted in Order 849, which referred to parking spaces as shown on plans. Specific number not	<b><i>Existing 90 plus + 46</i></b>	70 garage spaces added; 24 surface spaces removed. <b>Net</b>

Site or PUD Condition	Currently Applicable	Requested	Notes
	given in Order. 90 spaces are now on campus		<b>total = 136 spaces.</b> (2 fewer spaces than in 12.07.09 application).
<b>Access</b>	-1) During A.M and P.M peak, one-way counter-clockwise, entered from 17 <sup>th</sup> Street, exited from Kalmia Rd. 2) School to discourage parents from using Juniper, Holly and Jonquil Sts. 3) School to install school warning and crossing signs	1) same 2) same 3) same <i><b>-Add directional signs at 17<sup>th</sup> St. &amp; Kalmia Rd.; Build service drive adjacent to 17<sup>th</sup>.</b></i>	17 <sup>th</sup> St. entrance was to have been closed in off-peak hours, but this was not implemented, and <i><b>applicant requests condition be dropped.</b></i>
<b>Traffic Control</b>	Manual traffic control @ entrance and exit during peak hours and @ special events. Required to have a Transportation Management Plan (TMP). Requirements are described on page 8 of the Applicant's filing.	Same	<b>DDOT concerned about present TMP, and back-ups on 17<sup>th</sup> Street during drop-off &amp; pick-up hours, even after construction of proposed private access road parallel to 17<sup>th</sup> Street</b>
<b>Building Program</b>	Original 1924 Marjorie Webster Junior College structures historic may be eligible for historic designation	<i>1) Retention of 1924 structures; 2) 3,950 GSF addition to Parkside Building for labs, studios, theater, library &amp; common areas. 2) Demolition of non-historic Frazer Hall; replacement with below-grade garage, roof-top playing field &amp; 5100 SF gym addition.</i>	
<b>Community Involvement</b>	Establish Community Relations Council (CRC), chaired by community member and with majority of members being from community	Same	
<b>First Source/ MBOE</b>	MOU with LBOC	Same	
<b>Property Use Restrictions</b>	No outside fundraising activities on property other than community-related activities at applicant's discretion, with prior-notice to Community Relations Council.	Same	

The requested modifications would be undertaken in two phases:

- Phase I: Renovate the existing 6,150 GSF Parkside Building on 17<sup>th</sup> Street; construct a 3,950 GSF two-story addition with a green roof, to accommodate the proposed 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students; demolish the

existing 39,200 GSF Fraser Building in the northeastern corner of the campus; and increase the student count to 350 of existing 400 cap.

- Phase II: Construct a primarily underground garage (12,495 GSF would count as FAR) with a playing field on top on the site of the former Fraser Building; construct a 5,100 GSF addition to the gymnasium; and increase the student count to the existing cap of 400.

When completed, the plans would result in a reduction in FAR from .36 to .34 (-7,305 SF); the removal of 22 surface parking spaces and a net increase of 46 spaces, all of which would be located underground; an increase in the student body from the current 315 to the currently permitted 400; an increase in faculty and staff from 60 to the requested 100; and the construction of a new service road to address pick-up/drop-off queuing on public streets.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

OP's analysis is focused on the requested modifications to the number of grades, staff, parking and building additions, rather than on the overall approved PUD.

##### A. Compliance With Chapter 24 Requirements

The applicant has complied with all process requirements and has supplied information sufficient to recommend the scheduling of a public hearing. See pages 12-16 and Tab 1 of the application for details.

##### B. The Requested Flexibility Would Not Compromise the Intent and Purpose of the Zoning Regulations.

The proposal is consistent with the permission granted for schools and institutional uses in the R-1-A zone. Its height, bulk, and lot occupancy would be within the limits established for a PUD in that zone. It would exceed its minimum parking requirements.

##### C. The PUD Modifications Would Not Be Inconsistent With Comprehensive Plan

###### *Citywide Elements*

- Land Use Policies:

The *Future Land Use Map* designates the property for institutional uses such as the existing school.

*Policy LU-2.3.5: Institutional Uses. Recognize the importance of institutional uses, such as private schools, child care facilities, and similar uses, to the economy, character, history, and future of the District of Columbia. Ensure that when such uses are permitted in residential neighborhoods, they are designed and operated in a manner that is sensitive to neighborhood issues and that maintains quality of life. Encourage institutions and neighborhoods to work proactively to address issues such as traffic and parking, hours of operation, outside use of facilities, and facility expansion.*

The low scale and materials of the proposed new construction would be sympathetic to the existing school buildings, and not introduce new elements into the neighborhood.

The school has a limited number of school-related evening meetings: 5 in October; 4 in September and November; 3 in January, 2 in December and February – June; and none in

July and August. The applicant has an existing Transportation Management Plan, has recently initiated car-pooling changes to strengthen it, and has begun discussion with the neighborhood about the implications of the requested PUD modification. This is discussed further below.

*Policy LU-3.2.3: Non-Profits, Private Schools, and Service Organizations* states that it is important to “Ensure that large non-profits, service organizations, private schools, seminaries, colleges and universities, and other institutional uses that occupy large sites within residential areas are planned, designed, and managed in a way that minimizes objectionable impacts on adjacent communities. The zoning regulations should ensure that the expansion of these uses is not permitted if the quality of life in adjacent residential areas is significantly adversely affected”.

The school is planned and designed so that the scale of, location of, and access to its buildings minimizes objectionable impacts on the Colonial Village neighborhood. OP is not aware of there being existing community concern about the campus’ operations, but, should they emerge, OP would explore them thoroughly after setdown. The efforts to mitigate potential transportation impacts are described below.

*Policy LU-3.2.2: Corporate Citizenship.* It is important to “Support continued “corporate citizenship” among the city’s large institutions, including its colleges, universities, hospitals, private schools, and non-profits. Given the large land area occupied by these uses and their prominence in the community, the city’s institutions (along with the District itself) should be encouraged to be role models for smaller employers in efforts to improve the city’s physical environment. This should include a continued commitment to high quality architecture and design on local campuses, expanded use of “green building” methods and low impact development, and the adaptive reuse and preservation of historic buildings”.

The campus is well maintained and open to the public for community meetings, selected celebrations, and organized and informal sporting events. The large hill and fields at the bottom maintain a sense of open space next to Rock Creek Park. Because the grounds are not fenced, the open landscape affords neighbors the opportunity for leisure-time use. The proposed new construction would not change this relationship. Architectural and green design are discussed below.

- Educational Facilities Policies:

*Policy EDU-1.3.1: Private Schools* states that it is important to “recognize private schools as an important part of Washington’s educational infrastructure”. *Policy EDU-1.4.2: Promoting High-Quality Design* stresses the need to “use high architectural and landscape design standards that are sensitive to community context as well as academic and student safety needs”. *Policy EDU-1.4.4: Eco-Friendly Design* notes that it is important to “Strongly support the use of green building, energy efficiency, and low-impact development methods in school construction and rehabilitation”.

The addition of two grades would enable the Lowell School to create a middle school, which would parallel the grade structure of other public and private schools in the District, and help to retain Lowell’s relevance to Washington’s education infrastructure. The proposed building demolitions and the location and design of new construction would respect the rolling terrain, open landscape and dignified but informal architecture of the 1924 campus. The building density would continue to be farther from Rock Creek Park and would respect the traditional relationship between the school’s buildings and the neighborhood’s single family houses. As noted under “Environmental Policies”, the construction would incorporate green roofs and other sustainability features.

- **Transportation-Related Policies:**

*Policy LU-3.2.1: Transportation Impacts of Institutional Uses. “Support ongoing efforts by District institutions to mitigate their traffic and parking impacts by promoting ridesharing, carpooling, public transportation, shuttle service and bicycling; providing on-site parking; and undertaking other transportation demand management measures”.*

According to the applicant, the existing car-pooling and circulation features of the Transportation Management Plan include a carpool program, bike racks, and environment & energy classes designed to promote an awareness of the benefits of alternative modes of transportation. Since beginning conversations with OP and DDOT, the school has initiated several steps to expand its carpooling program, and –as part of the requested modification -- is planning to construct a service road parallel to 17<sup>th</sup> Street on which to “stack” cars that may be backed-up during student drop-off or pick-up times.

The applicant’s traffic impact study (Tab E of the filing) indicates that all of the study area intersections operate at Level of Service (LOS) C or better, except for the 16<sup>th</sup>/Juniper Street intersection, which experiences LOS D service 2% of the time. These LOS’s are considered acceptable for urban conditions. The study indicates that the roadway network will continue to operate at acceptable conditions after each Phase of the Lowell School’s growth, including increases in regional background traffic.

The traffic consultant states that with the combination of on-site roadway improvements, the underground garage and the designation of one staff member for traffic management issues, the capacity for accommodating vehicles temporarily on-site (e.g., drop-off and pick-up) would increase from 38 to 81. The school would also start to stagger arrival and dismissal times at the beginning of Phase 1 construction.

- **Environmental Policies:**

*Policy E-3.1.2: Using Landscaping and Green Roofs to Reduce Runoff. “Promote an increase in tree planting and landscaping to reduce stormwater runoff, including the expanded use of green roofs in new construction and adaptive reuse, and the application of tree and landscaping standards for parking lots and other large paved surfaces. 613.3 would employ green roofs atop new construction and would place its playing field on the garage roof to reduce the school’s heat island effect and to retain more open land for storm-water management”.*

The applicant has stated that the new construction would meet the standards of the LEED for Schools program and would include green roofs. The applicant would provide additional information at a hearing about its plans to expand recycling, maximize permeable surfaces, and use of green engineering.

### *Rock Creek East Elements*

- *Policy RCE-1.1.1: Conservation of Low Density Neighborhoods states: “Maintain and conserve the attractive, stable neighborhoods of the Rock Creek East Planning Area. Any new development in the Planning Area should be attractively designed and should contribute to the community’s positive physical identity”.*  
*Policy RCE-1.1.2: Design Compatibility stresses how important it is to “Ensure that renovation, additions, and new construction in the area’s low density neighborhoods respects the scale and densities of adjacent properties, avoids sharp contrasts in height and mass, and preserves parklike qualities such as dense tree cover and open space”.*

The proposed modification maintains the existing relationship between the campus and the neighborhood. There has been a school on this site since 1924, before the construction of other residences in this neighborhood. As Marjorie Webster junior college, the buildings were designed to appear as a large Spanish-Revival type estate at the top of a hill rolling down to the woods of Rock Creek Park. No building was more than 40 feet high. This appearance has been maintained by subsequent schools using the site, and these same relationships would be maintained under the proposed PUD modifications. Building additions would be lower than the buildings to which they would attach – less than 40 feet above grade. The addition to the three-story Parkside Building would be in the rear, not facing the community and would be only 2-stories high. The addition to the school's existing gymnasium would be patterned stucco with red tile roofs and would, again, be shorter than the existing building.

As Section 2207.2 of the Comprehensive Plan states, neighborhood residents noted during the Comprehensive Plan process that *“Land use planning for Rock Creek East should protect and enhance the stable neighborhoods for which the area is known. Residents at Comp Plan meetings described their neighborhoods as “park-like” due to their tree cover, low densities, and proximity to Rock Creek Park. An important part of what creates the park-like ambiance is the large federal and institutional properties in the community”*. The requested modifications would retain the openness of the campus and its existing tree canopy and fields adjacent to Rock Creek Park, would help to maintain the neighborhoods existing “park-like” character. In so doing it would help to conserve the positive attributes of the existing low-density neighborhood.

## **V. COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

The applicant has met informally with nearby residents and members of ANC 4A. Community questions have focused on understanding what, if any, the requested modifications would have on traffic in the neighborhood.

## **VI. OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY ISSUES**

DDOT staff has expressed concerns about observed car queuing on 17<sup>th</sup> Street during peak-hour pick-up time. They are concerned that the public roadway system would be burdened by drop-off and pick-up queuing with the full utilization of the permitted cap of 400 students, and the requested increase in faculty and staff from 60 to 100. DDOT staff has also indicated it does not think the school's transportation management plan places enough emphasis on promoting alternatives to private vehicle use.

The applicant has responded to DDOT regarding this and other concerns, has already instituted changes in its car-pooling program, and is continuing to meet with DDOT staff to resolve these matters prior to a public hearing. At a hearing, it would be particularly important for the applicant to discuss the consultant's queuing analysis on pages 23 and 32 of its traffic study.

OP is not aware of any other agency comments.

JLS/Stephen Cochran, project manager